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Stimulus Dollars Trickle Into City Coffers; Youth Get Job Boost

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The money promised to the City of Long Beach from the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, or stimulus bill, has started to trickle in, with just over \$13 million for health, homelessness and job training awarded to date.

Since April, the Long Beach City Council has approved the receipt of \$2.9 million for a Lead-Based Paint Hazard Control Program, \$874,992 for a Healthy Homes Demonstration Program, \$6.3 million in Workforce Investment Act Funds and \$3.5 million for a new Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program, according to the city manager's office.

The most recent and largest award – roughly \$6.3 million last week to The Pacific Gateway Workforce Investment Network – is expected to directly create more than 1,200 youth jobs this summer.

"I can't tell you how pleased I am to be able to have those resources," says Workforce Executive Director Bryan Rogers. "Right now [Long Beach is] around 12 percent unemployment rate, so we've got somewhere in the neighborhood of 30,000 residents that are out of work. What a difference [this] is going to make in terms of being able to impact and take care of the businesses and dislocated workers."

The Workforce Investment Network is administered by the City of Long Beach and oversees five local career centers, including a Youth Opportunity Center. It serves the communities of Long Beach, Lomita, Signal Hill, Torrance, San Pedro, Wilmington, Harbor City and the Harbor Gateway area.

Rogers says nearly half of the \$6.3 million will fund a Summer Youth Employment Training Program where approximately 2,500 high school and college students will be trained and then placed into employment with local public, nonprofit and business organizations.

"Immediately this is going to double what we would have served in terms of young people for the summer months through our Hire-A-Youth program," he adds. "The recovery funds will employ a little over 1,200 youth between July and September. They'll be able to work up to 25 hours a week, and they'll be placed at work sites throughout the city."

The money will also fund training for dislocated workers, including customized training for businesses, development of on-the-job training opportunities and temporary financial assistance to trainees, Rogers says.

The \$6,373,593 must be spent by 2010 and will be allocated as follows: dislocated workers, \$1,861,230; unemployed/underemployed adults, \$1,158,051; youth, \$2,726,003; and rapid response/business downsizing, \$628,309

Jobs Slow To Materialize

Stimulus funds are distributed to states and local governments using federal formulas. The city expects to receive a total of \$53 million in formula-based funding from the stimulus bill, and is applying for another \$522 million for 47 projects that will be awarded to cities on a competitive basis. It's estimated these projects will generate more than 4,300 short-term jobs.

"The formula [funding] is that which will come to us regardless, provided we meet the guidelines," says Geoffrey Hall, assistant to the city manager. "The competitive [grants] is where the bulk of the money is, and that's where a great deal of our efforts [will] be placed."

Federal officials have predicted the stimulus bill will directly create or save 3 million to 4 million jobs, 90 percent of them in the private sector. But locally, the pace of job creation has been slow. Hall says that should change as more money comes in and the city contracts out larger projects.

"For example, the lead abatement [program] at the health department will provide three years of funding for those employees," Hall says. "The individuals who were laid off . . . four of them were able to be retained with the new money. . . . Plus, the health department will also help to pay portions of other employees' salaries, [which] will help out in the long run."

Susan Price, the city's homeless services officer, says her office won't be adding to the city payroll but will see a handful of new jobs in the nonprofit sector as it rolls out the new homeless prevention programs this fall.

"We're going to be passing through funding to nonprofits that we work with, so there will be job creation," she says. "I anticipate, in addition to our existing system of care, there probably will be a total of five new positions created."

She stressed that the jobs created will be temporary, because it's a one-time program funded by a grant from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The program is expected to last for at least three years.

Price says the \$3.5 million should arrive by October 1 and will be split almost evenly between gap rental assistance, which provides up to six-months of back rent to eligible families, and the Rapid Re-housing Program, aimed at those currently homeless. It would pay up to 18 months in rental subsidies and require participants to find work and become self-sufficient.

"With the challenging economy and the high unemployment rate, we're seeing people falling through the cracks, and this money may be able to assist them so that they don't end up homeless," she says. "If a person has missed a couple of months and is being evicted, if we can pay that few months' back rent and the person can show proof that they would be able to sustain themselves if provided that assistance, then we have averted homelessness."

Long Beach will also benefit from \$1.58 million in stimulus funds given in April to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District to complete a dredging project in the Los Angeles River Estuary at the mouth of the L.A. River in Long Beach.

The project is expected to create about 16 direct jobs and 28 jobs for workers supplying or supporting the project.

Residents can track stimulus funding on the City of Long Beach's Stimulus Bill Homepage at www.longbeach.gov/citymanager/ga/stimulus.asp. The Web page explains how the stimulus bill works and how the city plans to access funding. It also provides a detailed, 40-page list of city projects and programs that have applied for federal funding.